Trestle Table

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Trestle Table

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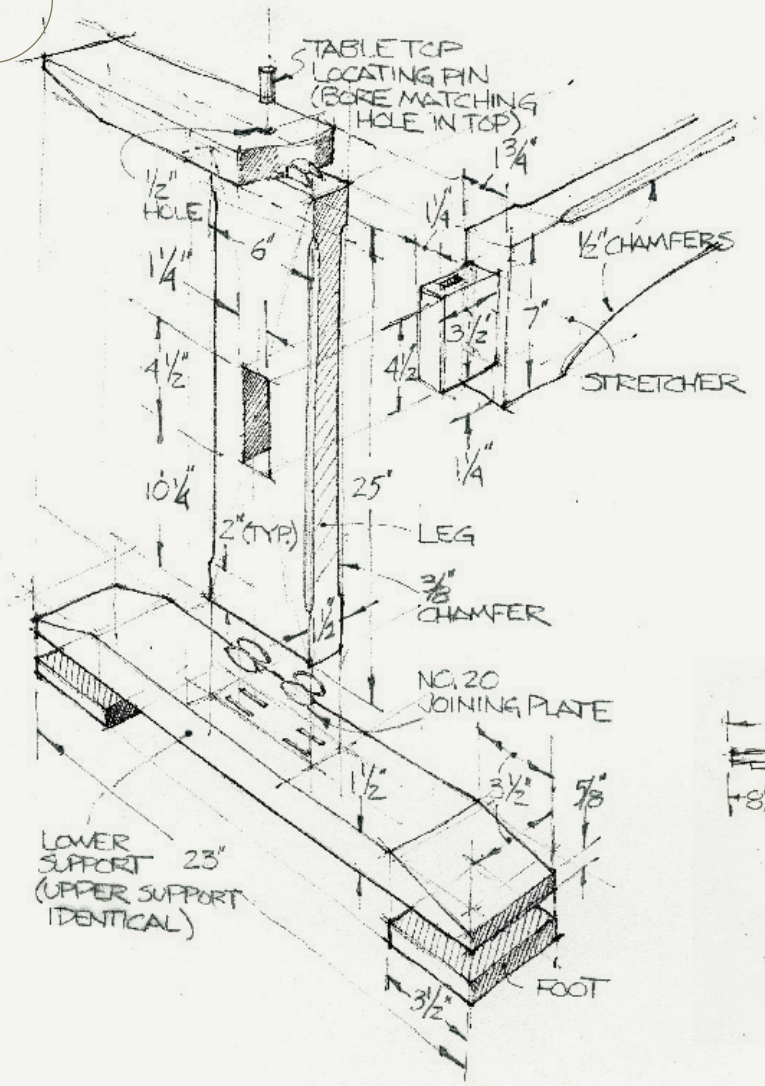
Popular Mechanics

Tools & Materials

WOOD
While medieval trestle tables were usually built of oak, we used maple for our version. If you're working entirely by hand, pine or poplar will be easier to handle. And if obtaining thick stock is a problem, consider laminating pieces from thinner material.

BASIC TOOLS
Circular saw (table saw or power miter saw is better), plate

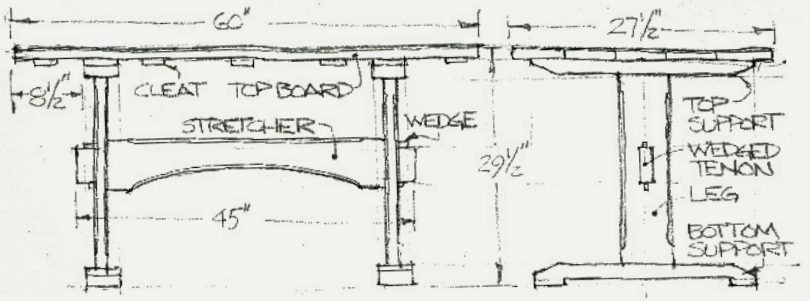
joiner (above), router, chamfer bit, drill/driver, 1¼-in. Forstner bit (drill press), 1⅛-in. spade bit (hand drill), twist bits,



Traditionally, each leg of a trestle table was mortised into the horizontal supports, but we've chosen a more up-to-date approach: plate joinery. These particular joints are not under any great load—and you'll have your fill of handcut mortises when you make the stretcher joints.

Before joining the supports to the legs, lay out the stretcher mortises. If you have a drill press, use a 1¼-in. Forstner bit to remove most of the waste. Without a drill press, use a 1⅛-in. spade bit in a portable drill. Clean up the mortises with a chisel, rout the stopped chamfers and cut the plate joints.

While the top won't be fastened, we've added a ½-in. pin in the center of each upper support to keep the top in place. Bore the hole for the pin, but don't glue it in yet. Finish the supports by adding the feet and sloping the ends, then assemble the parts. In order to have a stretcher tenon with enough meat to hold a ½-in. wedge, we made the stretcher 1¾ in. thick. This means custom planing, so talk to your lumber dealer if you don't own a thickness planer. A table saw with a dado blade is ideal for cutting the tenons, but a backsaw works, too. Trim the tenons with a razor-sharp chisel to slide easily into the pedestal mortises, and use a flexible pine stick to mark the stretcher curve.



½- and 1-in. chisels, mallet, plane, tape measure and square, marking gauge, bar or pipe clamps, ½-in. dowel centers

HARDWARE AND SUPPLIES

1¼-in. No. 8 rh screws and washers, No. 20 joining plates, glue

Quick Tip

Beveling router bits leaves the end of a stopped chamfer with one straight and one curved edge. For a handcut look, use a half-round file to round the straight side of the chamfer.

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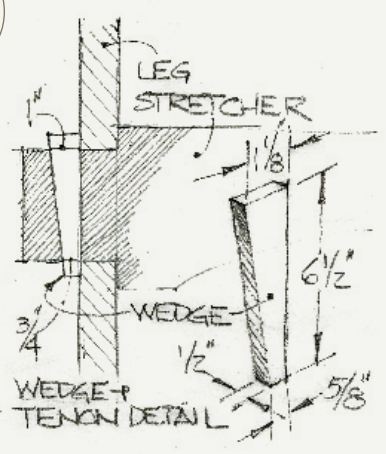
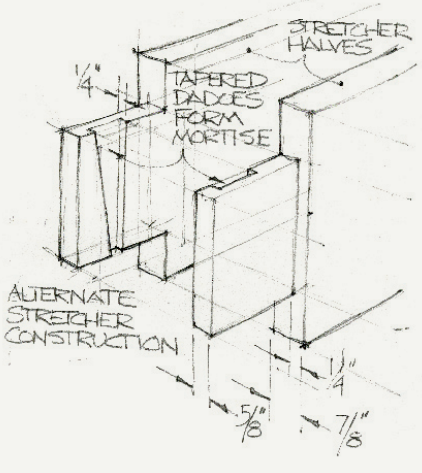


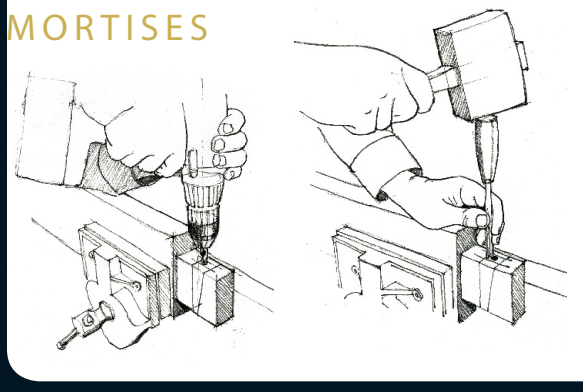
Lay out the tapered mortises on the stretcher tenons. Place the mortise a distance from the tenon shoulder that's just less than the leg thickness, so the shoulder will be drawn tight to the leg when the wedge is tapped in place.

As an alternative to handcut mortises, and as a way of using thinner stock, build the stretchers from two halves. If you use 5/4 material, you'll still need to do some planing, but the mortises can be made by cutting tapered dadoes in the halves.



CHOPPING TAPERED MORTISES

The long, tapered mortise is the trickiest cut you'll need to make. First, use a ⅜-in. bit to bore a hole through the tenon. Bore from both sides to the center. If you're a little off in the center, it matters less than being way off on one side. Then, sharpen a ½-in. chisel and take small bites from both sides using the layout lines as guides. With the mortises cut, make the wedges to fit.



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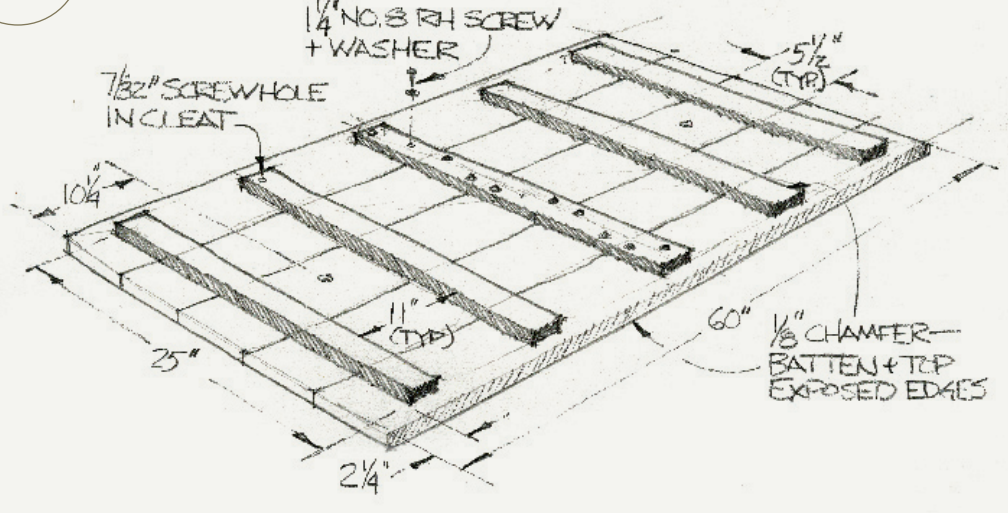

When you build the top, bore oversize screw clearance holes, and use roundhead screws with washers to allow the wood to expand and contract slightly. Check the ½-in. pin locations on the assembled trestle before marking the top for the matching holes. A foolproof approach is to use ½-in. dowel centers—short metal pins with a central point. Place one in each hole, position the top, and press the top down to mark the hole locations.